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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

In the first months of the war there was a spate of discussion about the political shape of Europe and of the world after the war. This interest in blueprints of the future died away under the stresses of the actual struggle. With the ridge, if not yet surmounted, at least in sight, men's thoughts are beginning again to turn, with perhaps a more sober sense of reality, to the shaping of the future.

The Prime Minister has spoken of the certainty that, "if we persevere, we shall come through these dark and dangerous valleys into a sunlight broader, more genial and more lasting than mankind has ever known." The Labour Party has affirmed its intention of bringing about a just and prosperous economic order in which political democracy and personal liberty will be combined with a reasonable standard of living for all citizens. In tones as passionate and stirring as any of the utterances by leaders of the United Nations Mr. Henry Wallace, the Vice-President of the United States, has hailed the coming century as the century of the common man.

Such hopes and purposes awaken a response in all of us. We should cease to be men if we did not long for escape from the present hell into a world in which want, suffering, injustice and fear no longer dominate the lives of men. We know too that to bring this about demands an immense expenditure of intelligence and grit. Men must take the responsibility on their own shoulders and not wait passively for God to act. But that is not the whole of the matter.

In most of what is said to-day about the future an essential note is missing. The deeper chords of human experience are not struck. It is assumed that human wisdom, resolve and endurance are sufficient in themselves to bring about the desired changes. The crucial question is the relation of this expectation to the ultimate truth of things. There are mysteries in the universe greater than man can comprehend. It is possible that through the convulsions and agencies of our time some purpose is being worked out that has found as yet scarcely any entry into our conscious minds. The real trend may be contrary to the plans we confidently make. The mighty sum of things may be working towards other ends than ours. This is the profound truth which religion in its highest forms has always asserted.

The sense that what God is doing is far more important than what we intend to do is a constantly recurring strain in the speeches and writings of Abraham Lincoln during the civil war in America, and some of his utterances quoted in a recent article in *Christianity and Crisis*, our opposite number in the United States, are well worth our pondering :—

"I have felt His hand upon me in great trials, and have submitted to His guidance."

"You all may recollect that in taking up the sword thus forced into our hands, this government appealed to the prayers of the pious and the good, and declared that it placed its whole dependence on the favour of God. I now humbly and reverently reiterate the acknowledgment of that dependence."

"The Almighty has His own purposes. If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him ?"

"We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this. But God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom, and our own error therein. Meanwhile, we must work earnestly in the best lights He gives us, trusting that so working will conduce to the great end He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay."

THE SUPPLEMENT

There are two ways of approaching the social problem. The one is to lay down general principles to which society ought to conform and then attempt to apply them. The other is to ask what is the actual present situation, what are the practical choices with which it confronts us, and which of these we ought to prefer in the light of Christian beliefs and values. In no historical situation are all Christian possibilities open to us. Effective action must be related to the existing situation.

This week's Supplement, the writer of which has a first-hand knowledge of the industrial problem, is an attempt to answer, tentatively and provisionally, the question of the significant changes which are taking place in industry during the war. The question of social justice, which is the concern of the Christian, is at bottom one of the distribution of power. What we have to ask is how social power, exercised by sinful men, can be so organized and controlled as to give the least occasion for injustice. It is from this standpoint that changes in the distribution of power must be judged.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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